

MARIA CANTWELL, WASHINGTON, CHAIR

AMY KLOBUCHAR, MINNESOTA  
BRIAN SCHATZ, HAWAII  
EDWARD MARKEY, MASSACHUSETTS  
GARY PETERS, MICHIGAN  
TAMMY BALDWIN, WISCONSIN  
TAMMY DUCKWORTH, ILLINOIS  
JON TESTER, MONTANA  
KYRSTEN SINEMA, ARIZONA  
JACKY ROSEN, NEVADA  
BEN RAY LUJAN, NEW MEXICO  
JOHN HICKENLOOPER, COLORADO  
RAPHAEL WARNOCK, GEORGIA  
PETER WELCH, VERMONT

TED CRUZ, TEXAS  
JOHN THUNE, SOUTH DAKOTA  
ROGER WICKER, MISSISSIPPI  
DEB FISCHER, NEBRASKA  
JERRY MORAN, KANSAS  
DAN SULLIVAN, ALASKA  
MARSHA BLACKBURN, TENNESSEE  
TODD YOUNG, INDIANA  
TED BUDO, NORTH CAROLINA  
ERIC SCHMITT, MISSOURI  
J.D. VANCE, OHIO  
SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO, WEST VIRGINIA  
CYNTHIA LUMMIS, WYOMING

LELA HARPER HELMS, MAJORITY STAFF DIRECTOR  
BRAD GRANTZ, REPUBLICAN STAFF DIRECTOR

## United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE,  
AND TRANSPORTATION

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6125

WEBSITE: <https://commerce.senate.gov>

July 27, 2024

Dear Administrator Whitaker,

Thank you for testifying on June 13, 2024, as part of the Senate Commerce Committee hearing on “FAA Oversight of Aviation Manufacturing.” As I mentioned during that hearing, I have serious concerns about FAA’s audits of Boeing and its suppliers, including whether the results of these audits indicate ongoing production issues or ineffective regulatory oversight, or both.

On January 11, 2024, following the door plug incident on Alaska Airlines flight 1282, I sent a letter to FAA requesting that the agency conduct a special audit on Boeing’s compliance on aircraft production.<sup>1</sup> Unlike FAA’s response to the prior letter I sent in January 2023,<sup>2</sup> this time FAA initiated a special audit shortly thereafter.

On April 4, 2024, you reported to the Committee that, in addition to the 2024 special audit, FAA had conducted a combined total of 298 audits of Boeing and Spirit AeroSystems over the prior two years, which did not result in any enforcement actions. Despite those prior audits, when the FAA conducted its 2024 special audit it continued to identify myriad “non-compliance issues in Boeing’s manufacturing process control, parts handling and storage, and product control.” While these terms are vague, they appear to cover a large part of Boeing’s production system.

The results of this recent special audit raise serious questions about: (1) what the FAA required of Boeing and its suppliers to correct the violations identified in the previous 298 audits, and (2) whether, in response to those 298 audits, FAA accepted corrective actions from Boeing and its suppliers that were inadequate to actually fix the underlying root causes of the identified noncompliances.

You further reported that the FAA “will work with [Boeing] over the coming weeks to address non-compliance issues,” and that FAA “will use the audit results to identify areas to strengthen our oversight policies.” However, it remains unclear how FAA will improve its oversight of Boeing and ensure that Boeing addresses the root causes of the noncompliances identified from all these recent audits.

While the FAA has rightly focused on Boeing’s production quality shortcomings, I am concerned about whether FAA action—or inaction—contributed to Boeing’s problems. As the

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.commerce.senate.gov/2024/1/cantwell-gives-faa-2-weeks-to-provide-answers-on-its-boeing-production-line-oversight>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.commerce.senate.gov/services/files/2F1F1DF3-FC26-466D-8C43-608AB0306758>.

Committee's 2021 Whistleblower Report detailed, Boeing took full advantage of the FAA's policies in support of "efficiency" at the expense of regulatory compliance.<sup>3</sup> The report made it clear that the FAA "trusted" Boeing to comply, despite years of evidence to the contrary.

The Aircraft Certification, Safety, and Accountability Act (ACSAA) gave the FAA clear direction that this focus on efficiency at the expense of compliance is no longer acceptable. And the recent ODA Expert Panel Report confirms that many of the problems that prompted Congress to pass ACSAA have still not been resolved.<sup>4</sup>

A root cause analysis would ensure both Boeing and FAA have discovered the core causes of problems, rather than just symptoms. Therefore, I write to request that the FAA (1) perform a thorough root cause analysis to identify any deficiencies in its own oversight of Boeing and other manufacturers, (2) develop corrective actions and a plan for implementing them, and (3) report back to this Committee on its findings, corrective actions, and plan to implement them. In addition, please provide information as to how FAA will strengthen its policies to improve its oversight of aviation manufacturers.

Given the urgency of addressing these issues, please provide a response by August 12, 2024 detailing your plan to satisfy these requests. FAA's effective regulatory oversight is key to ensure Boeing, other aviation manufacturers, and the United States remain the gold standard for aviation safety. To this end, we believe it critical for FAA to undertake this process of self-evaluation.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this request.

Sincerely,



Maria Cantwell

Chair

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.commerce.senate.gov/services/files/9DCEC985-9D3C-4B47-AC82-CB3449618D05>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.faa.gov/newsroom/review-panels-final-report-organization-designation-authorizations-oda-design-and>.